



Pot of Gold Filled with Empty Promises

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MADISON – The mythical story of the “pot of gold” says to search for the treasure at the end of a rainbow, but scammers will have you believe that the pot of gold is coming directly to you. Among their favorite tricks are foreign lottery scams. The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) warns that foreign lottery promotions are phony – and illegal.

“Americans lose more than \$120 million a year to foreign lottery schemes,” said Sandy Chalmers, DATCP Assistant Deputy Secretary. “If you purchase a foreign lottery ticket through a solicitation, your name will be placed on a ‘sucker list’ used by crooks, and you can expect more offers for phony lotteries or investments.”

DATCP occasionally hears from consumers who are tied up in a cycle of payments to scammers after falling for a fake foreign lottery pitch. Initially they received a phone call or mailing from a scammer telling them that they can win a major prize by purchasing a lottery ticket using the sender’s “secret system.”

The payment cycle kicks in as victims are repeatedly asked for money for additional tickets or to secure a non-existent prize. Over time, victims begin to fear stopping these payments at the risk of losing out both on the expected prize and on the money that they have already invested in the scheme.

DATCP offers the following tips for avoiding these and other prize scams:

- It is illegal to enter foreign lotteries and there are no secret systems for winning them.
- Ignore all mail and phone solicitations that promise big prizes in foreign lotteries or contests. If you receive what looks like lottery or sweepstakes material from a foreign country, destroy it or report it to the Bureau of Consumer Protection.
- You should never have to pay to win a prize or to “improve” your chances of winning (unless you are entering a local raffle).
- Never wire money, turn over the card numbers on a prepaid debit card or provide personal or banking information in response to an unsolicited offer.
- Some scams may require you to call a “900” number to claim your prize. Calling this number will cost you a per-minute fee.
- Legitimate contest offers will include rules, information on how to enter and the odds of winning.

For additional information, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at <http://datcp.wisconsin.gov>, send an e-mail to datcp hotline@wisconsin.gov or call the Consumer Information Hotline.

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